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Gray Smoke Over the Vatican

That Soviet agents had a hand in the attempted assassination of John Paul II in 1981 no longer seems a wild surmise. A web of fresh detail supports the Italian Government's suspicion that the would-be killer, Mehmet Ali Agca, acted in concert with Bulgarian intelligence agents. Italy has yet to divulge all its evidence, but some corroborative details were reported this week by our colleague, Nicholas Gage.

There is growing and consistent testimony about the ruthlessness of Bulgaria's security service and its intimacy with the Soviet secret service. The Turkish assassin's account of his contact with Bul-

garian agents seems to be surviving the careful inquiry that Italy's Judge Martella has been pursuing. And a Bulgarian defector in France reportedly claims that he was actually told of a plot to kill the Pope for his encouragement of rebellion in Poland.

Bulgaria's protests would be more persuasive if it agreed to the extradition of officials whom Judge Martella wants to question. Mere denial is no longer sufficient to clear its agents of complicity in this foul and stupid act. On present evidence, the case against them is not proven, but it is beginning to look like a case.